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Council to speed parking solution

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Feuds With Everyone

Article Text:

CHAPEL HILL -- The Chapel Hill Town Council has agreed to expedite the review of a proposed solution to downtown's most well-known parking challenge.

Call it addition by division. Property owner P.H. Craig wants land that has been used for parking removed from a 1979 special use permit that binds it to The Courtyard shopping center on West Franklin Street.

Craig and Courtyard owner Spencer Young have a stormy relationship and haven't reached a lease agreement on the property since Young bought the development in 2005. Craig closed his property to Courtyard use over the summer.

Since the 1979 permit and current zoning stipulate that the property can only be used for parking in conjunction with The Courtyard, Craig also asked the council to rezone it from the Residential-3 district to a Town Center-2 classification that allows use for parking.

He said that amending the permit and rezoning the land behind The Courtyard -- between Roberson Street and Basnight Lane -- would create 30 new spaces and make approximately 150 available for use.

"This would really just legitimize what's existed for 20 or 30 years," Craig said.

Members of the council as well as the Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership were in favor of moving Craig's request along. Liz Parham, executive director of the Downtown Partnership, said that Young had already moved on from the original permit by acquiring lots on Graham Street.

Town And Others
Have Tried To Help

Lousy Landlord

"This application gives Mr. Craig the ability to move forward as well, and we think that's very important," Parham said.

Disagreements over parking have been a burden on Courtyard tenants, employees and customers in particular. The original permit promised at least 79 parking spaces for The Courtyard, but tenants have complained that the standoff between Craig and Young has cut that number to 23.

Craig was happy the town agreed to expedite review of his request, although he has not been given an indication of when those spaces would be available if the changes were approved.

"It doesn't mean it's fast, it just means it's not as slow as it would be," he said of the expedited review.

Calls to town planning officials for more details were not returned.

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